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ABSTRACT

This discussion centers on the role of libraries in providing postsecondary students and other users with instruction in the use of library resources. It reviews the history of library user education, examines the effects of hard economic times on library instruction, and describes User Education Resources (USER), an Australian database containing both print and audiovisual instructional materials related to the education of library users. A bibliography lists 14 references. (FM)

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WILL THE USER SINK OR SWIM?:

UTILISATION OF USER EDUCATION RESOURCES TO ADVANTAGE

by

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WILL THE USER SINK OR SWIM?:

UTILISATION OF USER EDUCATION RESOURCES TO ADVANTAGE

I believe it would be helpful to begin with a brief historical introduction to the justification of user education. The examples I use will be predominantly from the tertiary area, not only the area I know best, but the area in which user education first began.

Following that, I will present some discussion on the pressures that are now beginning to be felt as this period of austerity begins to take hold. Again, my examples will be predominantly from the tertiary area.

And finally, I will present to you details of a new aid that may keep user education afloat until better times return. Happily, I can announce here, that it will be of benefit to all libraries - school, public, community, tertiary and special - where user education is required.

If the principal purposes of tertiary education are to provide a basic general education, appreciation of ideas, vocational training and the development of skills and techniques directly applicable to the students' present and future needs[1], then the principal roles of the tertiary library, in supporting the objectives of the academic community, must be to provide and facilitate use of educational resources by students both during their course of study and afterwards in keeping professionally up-to-date and by academics.

The library's ability to perform these roles is however, being substantially reduced by such obstacles as the reduction, in real terms, of available funds, the need to meet the communities' calls for accountability and the need to cater for expanding areas of information science. Libraries, are being called upon more and more to justify their expenditure on many of their current and proposed functions.

One of the library's most fundamental roles, yet an often criticised and questioned one, is in facilitating use of its educational resources. Whilst many librarians, academics and administrators have put forward arguments to justify the introduction, continued use or expansion of user education, few empirical studies can be found supporting it and none demonstrating its necessity.

The arguments put forward in the literature supporting user education, principally cover long recognised subjective reasons relating to the need for libraries and the need to know how to effectively utilise the resources they contain.

Arguments supporting user education have been recorded in the literature for 150 years, dating ack to the 1820's, when librarians and university administrators in the United States first began to provide reasons for its support.

Columbia University's President once wrote in a report ... "the average college student ... is ignorant of the greater part of the bibliographical apparatus which the skilled librarian has in hourly use to enable him to answer the thousand queries of the public. A little systematic instruction would so start our students in the right methods, that for the rest of their lives all their work in libraries would be more expeditiously accomplished ... ... In fact, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that now students often ... spend half their time in the library finding out what they do not want to know, and the remaining half in getting confused notions of what they do want to know."(2)

To quote, another University's President (Chicago) "the equipment of the library will not be finished until it shall have upon its staff men and women whose entire work shall be, not the care of books, not the cataloguing of books, but the giving of instruction concerning its use."(3)

It is hard to imagine that these two statements were made more than three quarters of a century ago (1883 and 1902 respectively), yet are so relevant today. With the increased complexity of libraries and their resources over those seventy-five plus years, it is little wonder that if user instruction was necessary then, it is imperative today.

While these leading American universities and others were being so perceptive, it was nearly a generation before their user education programmes were to influence the British in any serious way.

Until the 1920's, the British had been more concerned with improving their collections and buildings than giving students instruction in the use of the library, though some librarians, before the First World War, had been influenced by the use in German universities, of seminar libraries set up as departmental libraries where students could be taught how to use books and libraries by the academic staff.(4)

Whilst some development began in the 1920's, the cause received little support until 1948, when the Royal Society, through its Scientific Information Conference, recommended that undergraduates should receive a general introduction to the university library by the university staff and at the postgraduate level detailed instruction by library staff should be given in the methods of looking for and of clearly asking for scientific information. These recommendations were forwarded to the Consultative Committee of Vice Chancellors, Principals of Universities, Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureau (normally referred to as Aslib), and the Library Association in order to reduce the incidence of a repetition of work done elsewhere and previously recorded in the literature of science.(5)

These recommendations were responsible for the Library Association immediately establishing a working party which recommended - (1) that all first year students

should be given introductory talks on the use of the library; (2) an introduction to bibliographies both general and specific should be given to first or early second year students; and (3) advanced bibliography should be taught to post-graduate students. However, most programmes were doomed to failure because of the enormous expansion of universities in the late 1950's and 1960's.(6) Forty-six percent of the 157 colleges polled in 1965 in Great Britain indicated that their instruction programmes were failing to meet the need due to lack of staff, time, money for experimentation, and lack of co-ordination and interest from the faculty and administration.(7)

Perhaps, it was a reflection of the rapid development of technology, or perhaps, a result of the decline in user education or a bit of both that a survey conducted in 1963 in Great Britain showed a serious lack by researchers of adequate knowledge of bibliographical aids. The survey conducted by the Aslib Research Department showed that 245 of 647 scientists engaged in industrial, academic or government research were unaware of the availability of research results on topics that they were researching. In other words, thirty-eight percent of research projects at that time had either totally or in part duplicated work already done and reported in the literature.(8)

It was at the time of this survey that once again a change in direction occurred. In Britain, the completion of major educational expansion of its universities and colleges (which were more experimentally minded and not suffering from the overcrowding of the universities of the past), led to a new revival of user education. To complement this new revival and development, two major higher educational reports on British education were published, both giving significant support to user education.

The first of these reports, THE COMMITTEE ON UNIVERSITY

TEACHING METHODS (The Hale Committee Report) published in 1964, gives strong support to user education in its statement on libraries ... "we regard it as essential that library facilities for undergraduates as well as for research students and staff should be adequate and that students learn to use them ..."(9)

In 1967, the COMMITTEE ON LIBRARIES REPORT (The Parry Committee Report) devoted a chapter called "Guidance in the Use of Libraries" to user education, recommending that all students be given preliminary guidance on the lay-out of the library, its regulations and procedures. It further recommended that at a later stage, the exact timing of which should be given careful consideration, seminars should be held and lectures given on the use of bibliographical tools and guidance on the literature of the student's own subject.(10)

At the same time, a new system of higher education was being established in Australia by the creation of Colleges of Advanced Education. The SECOND REPORT OF THE COMMONWEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ADVANCED EDUCATION (The Wark Committee Report), in 1969, gave strong support to the need for students to become self sufficient in the library use through the assistance of user education programmes run by library staff. "It is a major function of tertiary education to train students to work on their own and to lessen their dependence on lecturers and tutors. Librarians share in this responsibility as part of their educational function. There is a need to train students so that immediately after graduation, they may play an effective role in commerce, industry, the public service, or the arts. In addition to giving students competence in their current investigations, the institute should aim to produce graduates who are capable of keeping themselves up-to-date in their profession over a long period of time, and who are aware of the social and cultural implications of their work. One of the major qualities of a professional is that he is aware of the latest developments in his field and of their

significance to it. If academic libraries are to play a vital educational role, they cannot do otherwise than enter completely into active participation in the teaching programme, setting up their own courses of instruction."(11)

Meanwhile, the development of user education programmes in the United States, which had become a fairly refined procedure producing a significant amount of literature yearly, and those in Great Britain began to wane through no fault of their own. As higher education became more accessible, and new course proliferated, universities and colleges grew enormously and student numbers swelled to such an extent that user education librarians found it impossible to cope.

Although this trend continued for a few years, a revolution was swelling that would soon reverse it. The cries of discontent with mass education teaching philosophies were to be heard both in America and Great Britain during the early 1960's, with the most notable being the riots in 1964 at the University of California, Berkeley. From the actions of students at Berkeley and at other American campuses, resulted a movement stressing the need for smaller classes and a closer working relationship between students and teaching staff.(12) This, in turn, led to a revival of user education techniques that were more attune to small classes than in trying to reach the masses.

With what has just been said about the broad and general reasons for supporting user education, there are in addition a number of important specific arguments supporting it.

Kilgour, a leading information scientist, for example, gives strong support for the humanising of library services and the need to teach individuals to learn for themselves. He believes ... "it is difficult to see how an individual can make much way in the knowledge-based world of the immediate future, unless he is a perpetual learner."(13)

Further, in this knowledge-based world, society expects the graduate to be either the possessor of appropriate knowledge or to know where to get it. However, knowledge and interpretations of knowledge are changing at an alarming rate. By the time the graduate commences work, much of the knowledge he has spent so long in acquiring has already been changed, modified or re-interpreted.(14) While his teachers have taught him to be logical, introspective, creative, philosophical, analytical, and critical, rarely have they prepared him for keeping himself up-to-date, to independently continue to build on the logic and creativity they have taught him.

Probably the greatest responsibility of a professional today is not getting, but staying educated which requires coping with the problem of an exponentially increasing knowledge explosion: a problem which is matched by the exponentially increasing information sources, and it is especially the multiplication of bibliographic access routes to these sources that creates a problem for the professional.

On the other hand, the librarian's unique contribution to the community is his special knowledge of information sources, systems, access routes and productive search strategies. These being relevant to both information systems, networks, and the pecularities and individualistic elements of libraries themselves.

Once again, the old threat and challenge to the continuance of user education descends upon us.

Funds for the expansion of educational developments have all but dried up, in fact funds in real terms have been seriously eroded affecting the operation, in one way or another, of libraries.

Whilst this growing restriction in the availability of funds affects all libraries, school, public, special and tertiary, not only in their collection development, but in their services as well, it is particularly evident

in tertiary libraries where their collection strengths are the basis of research and inter-library loan services.

These pressures are in particular felt by the principal librarian in charge who must make, in conjunction with the best advice he can receive from his colleagues and authorities, critical decisions which will determine the degree of survival of his library system.

The conflict confronting the principal librarian is generally how to reduce the costs associated with collection development and/or how to maintain library services with reduced resources of staff and funds.

The attempts toward a solution to these problems must be the subject of another paper on the management of libraries in times of austerity. However, let it suffice for me to say for the purposes of this paper, that all professional librarians have an obligation to do their utmost in fulfilling the ideals of their professions no matter how daunting the circumstances that confront them from time to time. We must pull together if we are to reduce the affects of hard times.

I believe, earlier in this paper, I have provided sufficient evidence of how hard times affect user education and it is this area I wish to further concentrate my energies on.

While the principal librarian will probably be forced to make cuts, it is important that the cuts made do least damage to the long fought for and established library services. Cuts will probably be made in many library areas, including what I call formal user education, i.e. the lecturing to large and small groups of students and covering in-depth library use techniques. To a certain extent these cuts can now be offset by the production of software resources, i.e. handouts of all description, the production of synchronised tape/slide programmes, etc. You might immediately think that this is equally as time consuming as taking classes, as the

time to get ideas and develop them into a package that would be helpful and up to now you would be perfectly correct.

I say 'up to now', because an aid is just being finalised that will help you with the gathering and utilisation of ideas. This aid is a data base of user education resources which is held at the Caulfield Institute of Technology and comprises a wide range of resources both print and non-print.

Let me tell you something about the development of this data base.

In 1976, at a meeting of ALCAE, I proposed that investigations be made into the establishment of a collection of all resources associated with the library's communication to its users.

This means -

- guides to how to use the library
- how to use specific things such as indexes and abstracts
- tape slide promotional kits
- films and videotapes
- the use of adequate signs
- etc.

The reasons behind my request for investigations were that it would generate a mine of information from which libraries could gleen new ideas for the improvement of their own programmes or the development of programmes for the first time.

Many libraries have failed to develop <u>aids</u> for the promotion of their services and for the use of its many complex components. Some of the reasons for this are -

- lack of acceptance that the user needs any help
- a belief that if he does need help then he will <u>ask</u> for help
- they do not know how to go about it
- they do not have the time to develop ideas

- they believe they need creative talents
  to produce such things
- they have "tried it" and failed.
  (Why did they "fail"?)
- they believe that they have losts of signs
  (after all, everyone can make and
  put up signs)
- etc., etc.

This collection of aids is of course not a new thing. It is not a revolution, just another step towards the improving of the library's communication towards the breaking down of those real barriers between our users and our rigid librarians.

In 1976, when I began my research into what to collect, how to collect, organise and disseminate these user resources, I was working without knowledge of the existence of the clearinghouse in the United States called LOEX (Library Orientation EXchange) which had been operating since 1972 and is located at Eastern Michigan University, Center for Educational Resources and has operated as a deposit and loan scheme for user education materials. (Over the years it has built up a collection exceeding 10,000 items). So, much of the work done was done in isolation. As my research (which was operating at no more than a snail's pace), was nearing an end, 2 factors assisted in its completion. The first was an overseas study tour in 1978 which included talks with LOEX representative, as well as the newly formed group LIMB (Library Instruction Materials Bank) in the United Kingdom. In my talks with Ian Malley, the Information Officer for User Education and also in charge of LIMB, both in the United Kingdom and when he came to Australia for the 1979 Library Biennial Conference, the planning of the data base came another step closer to finality. The second important event affecting progress towards finality of the data base was the coming of a new Director to the Caulfield Institute of Technology, Mr. Ron Cumming. The new Director, coming from a university and research based background,

decided that the Caulfield Institute of Technology needed a boost of funds in its research projects beneficial to the community and it was through him that I received $11,000 to employ a Special Projects Librarian to design and implement a system that would organise user education resources and allow librarians everywhere access. Ms. Johanna Cook was appointed in mid-May 1979 and has worked on this project, in a part-time capacity, for the remainder of that year. The planning for USER is now complete. Nine centres have been established in the capital city and territory of each state in Australia and one in New Zealand.

The overall operation of this plan goes something like this - a subscription membership is required from all libraries both those that send material to the data base as well as those who only wish to access the data. These funds will allow for the continual development of the system and pay for fixed costs such as coding, input, production of fiche and mailing. The system will operate with Caulfield Institute of Technology as the central organiser and processor. It must receive 9 copies of print materials for coding and dissemination to the other 8 data bases. It will convert tape-slide productions (one copy for 2 weeks only is required) on to a standard video U-matic or National ½" for further distribution to data bases. It will, twice yearly, produce updates through ACI and Micromation, a com bureau, will produce a fiche of the contents of the data base. It is proposed, though it is up to each collection centre, that materials not be lent as this would weaken the strength of the data base and make trips by librarians, many of them covering long distances to the site of the data base, somewhat a useless exercise. Photocopies, of course, may be provided at the data base's discretion although the Copyright restrictions, if any, should be abided by. It is my suggestion to them that they do not lend and that enquirers be satisfied with a photocopy or be encouraged to approach the originating source for a copy of the material in which they show interest. This is especially so with A.V. productions.

The embryonic data base, which was compiled using only the resources from a selected number of libraries, currently holds about 900 items and so far there have been few problems in getting producers to deposit their work in the data base. No doubt, there could be the occasional reluctance by the producer of a work if they felt that others might blatantly take their ideas and considerable energies and use them without giving the recognised credits and acknowledgements. Some, also, may be reluctant to donate their work because it does include ideas and concepts developed by others, but not acknowledge in the second work. I think a third reason for reluctance by some is that materials such as tests developed for a teaching programme may be used out of context for they do not have lecture or explanatory notes appended to them. I believe these problems can be overcome as we mature in our habits and, perhaps, become a little less selfish and somebody else's talents by giving credit where credit is due.

It is planned that USER will be supplemented with a bi-monthly journal READER which will include snippets of information on material recently received as well as being a newsheet of developments occurring throughout libraries in Australia and New Zealand that are of interest to user education librarians. Its survival is dependent upon you and your colleagues contributing news items. It is not intended that it become a literary journal.

Finally, some international co-operation has been achieved through liaison with LOEX and LIMB. The Caulfield Institute of Technology, as the central processor in the system, will select a number of items which it believes are of international standard and that may present a new idea which could be taken up by others in other countries. Likewise, it will receive similar materials from LOEX and LIMB which, though centrally held at the Caulfield Institute of Technology, will be announced through READER and probably made available through inter-library loan. All that USER needs now is your support, for without it the energies and costs associated with

its development will be wasted and would, no doubt, be a sure sign to cthers hoping to enter into the field promoting librarianship, that general support is not available. The data base is about promoting new ideas, saving both money and effort.

Thank you.

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